

GROUP PROVING CAMROSE HAS APPETITE FOR ORIGINAL MUSIC

– Rose City Roots Music Society events increasingly popular

By Brett Browne, Camrose Booster, February, 2009.

A group of local music lovers are proving that there is a healthy appetite in the community for live music. The Rose City Roots Music Society has been attracting bigger and bigger crowds to its monthly musical events and has even had a few recent sell-outs.

"We're starting to make a name for ourselves," explains Society member Geraint Osborne who is in charge of booking acts for the monthly presentations held at Scalliwags Pub and Rum Bar. The Rose City Roots Music Society is in the midst of its third season. It is a non-profit organization operated by a motivated group of volunteers dedicated to bringing original live music to Camrose and to helping maintain the vitality of the downtown.

"We want to contribute to the arts and culture of Camrose – it's about bringing acts to Camrose so that people don't have to go out of town to see quality music; they can have it right here in their own back yard," explains Osborne.

Contributing to the popularity of Rose City Roots events this season has been the presentation of several high profile acts including the popular Irish punk band the Mahones, who have opened for the likes of Van Morrison and the Waterboys.

"We thought it was quite a coup to bring the Mahones to town," comments Osborne. The Mahones sold out their Camrose performance, as did Edmonton country rock band, The Wheat Pool. And, local fans got a pleasant surprise when folk singer Carolyn Mark came to town.

"Her good friend Corb Lund also showed up and so that was a surprise for the audience to have someone of his calibre up there on stage," relates Osborne, who says that the quality of the performers is one reason local audiences have been growing. "We're bringing in bands that are quite well known and that is helping to build up a good following."

"There were quite a few people who were surprised that the Mahones were in Camrose," he adds. "In fact, they said they were getting ready to go see them in Calgary or Edmonton."

Attracting some bigger names to Camrose has not only made an impression with local audiences, it has also caught the attention of the music industry. Osborne says bands and music promoters are now contacting the Rose City Roots Music Society to inquire about playing dates in Camrose. He claims that the positive, intimate environment they are able to offer artists has been a big factor in bringing them to the city.

"We were able to play up the fact that it's an intimate setting in Camrose at Scalliwags, that you're going to have an audience that is paying attention and is appreciative of what you're doing, and bands are drawn to that as well. It's not always just about making money – they like those opportunities to connect with an audience," he explains.

According to Osborne, the Rose City Roots Music Association made a conscious decision this season to try and bring in a more eclectic group of artists, partly in the hope of attracting a younger demographic, something he says they accomplished at their two sold out performances.

"It's not just folk music now. It's a good variety of musical styles. We still haven't brought in a jazz act, but it is something that we're looking at doing. There's also some talk about bringing in some reggae or ska music. We'd really like to have some diversity in the musical styles," he says.

Osborne feels that the Society has not only been successful in creating an audience for live music in Camrose, but also in developing a social occasion which helps bring the community together.

"We're giving people an opportunity to get out, meet each other and spend some time together. They are there to see the act and have a good time, but they also end up talking to one another. In that way we feel we're contributing to community life," he says.

The Rose City Roots Music Society season runs from September until May. Osborne says they try to organize at least one performance a month, usually on a Saturday night. The Sheepdogs were the featured act February 7 and up-and-coming Saskatchewan band The Deep Dark Woods is booked for April. An act to perform in March has not yet been confirmed.

As excited as they are with the success that they have enjoyed thus far, Osborne says the Roots Music Society is even more optimistic about next year's season. He says discussions have already taken place with Garnett Rogers, brother of Canadian folk legend Stan Rogers, and a notable performer in his own right.

The Society is also one of the groups that is anxiously awaiting the restoration of the Bailey Theatre, which Osborne says would be an ideal venue for some of the higher profile acts that the group is starting to attract.

"Once the Bailey is up and running, that will open up a whole other level of acts for us," he states. In the meantime, the Society is working hard to build on the success that they've had. As a non-profit group, funding is always an issue, but they have been supported by a good group of local sponsors which make the performances possible.

"We are really grateful for all the financial support we receive from our local sponsors and are especially appreciative of Skalliways for providing us with a great venue," says Osborne.

They are also hoping to build their Society membership and are looking at ways to enhance member benefits including the ability to purchase season tickets.

For more information on the Rose City Roots Music Society you can visit their web-site at www.rosecityroots.ca